

DEMOGRAPHIA



MALAGA: HEART OF RETIREMENT HAVEN

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Urbanized Area* Population	600,000	Brasilia, Hamilton, Zaragoza
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	65	Tianjin, Barrie, Christchurch, Strausburg
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	170	
Population per Square Mile	9,200	Sendai, Paris, Munich
Population per Square Kilometer	3,600	
*Continuously built up area		

18 June 2004

Malaga is just up the road from Gibraltar. Malaga might be thought of as the “core” urban area of the Andalusian coast that is becoming home to so many retirees from Great Britain, Germany and Scandinavia.

One of the oldest urbanization jokes is the old “the official bird is the crane” line. In the late 1970s, the construction cranes in downtown Denver evoked such comments. In the 1990s, it was Berlin, rapidly seeking to neutralize the 50 years of the worst kind of planning distortions. But where the “crane” is really king is the Iberian coast of from Algarva in Portugal to Valencia in Spain. I am unaware of any data on the subject, but it appears likely that the development along the coast from Portugal to Valencia is more significant even than the decades of similar

development along the Florida coasts. And, the Iberian development has occurred in a shorter period of time.



The coast of these two nations illustrates the growing difficulty of categorizing urban growth. Traditional urban definitions are increasingly ineffective. Malaga, like the Tokyo-Nagoya-Kobe and beyond corridor is a good example. Where does the urban area start and where does it end? On the Andalusian coast, low-density urbanization will be found for mile after mile. South and west of Malaga, along the coast, retirement housing, detached and condominium, will be found virtually all

the way to La Linea, just north of Gibraltar. And the urbanization continues westward from Malaga, (though the rental car turned north toward Granada). Along the road will be seen numerous signs enticing retirees to the new developments.

The coastal development is not traditional urbanism. The retirees who make up most of the new population do not commute to the core or suburbs of Malaga every day. It would appear that as time goes on the concept of labor markets will become more important than continuous urbanization. Somewhere there must be a line that represents the end of Tokyo oriented urbanization and the start of Shizuoka oriented urbanization. Other lines would need to be drawn before Nagoya, Osaka, Okayama and Hiroshima. The same is true in the Malaga area. Perhaps Malaga begins southwest of the airport, or perhaps 15 or so miles to the southwest.

But on entry into the city, one of the first things that will be noticed is the sprawling shopping center along the east side of the freeway. It appears that suburban, or at least non-core shopping has long since become a major activity here. This, of course, mirrors developments in other Iberian peninsula urban areas, and for that matter throughout Europe. But European cities did not accelerate their own decline by, as it were, busing families to the suburbs. Approximately one-half of the central city population loss in the United States occurred during the decade of aggressive forced busing. The purpose was to eliminate de-facto racial segregation, but instead it entrenched it greater, as people moved away in fear that their kids would be sent to unsafe schools in unsafe neighborhoods. This is just one more indication of how well meaning planners can spark resistance to their edicts that intensify, rather than reduce distortions.

The Malaga urbanized area has approximately 600,000 people living in 65 square miles. Like other Spanish urban areas, it has many high-rise residential buildings. But, unlike nearby Seville, a large percentage of Malaga housing is detached. And, the detached housing begins very close to the core. Just a few blocks north of the downtown area, single-family dwellings begin to be seen, and become predominant as you drive further from the core.

In addition, the area has many wide boulevards, with center islands, lined by palm trees. But a surprise are the downtown streets that are completely shaded by huge trees. This is somewhat reminiscent of places in New Orleans. But these are main streets, and they are nearly dark even at midday. The shaded segments are only a block or two long, but it is a unique feature of Malaga.



Like the other urban areas along the coast of both Spain and Portugal, there is an abundance of sun colors --- beige, rose and pink.

Malaga is one of the few European central cities that is growing. There is a simple reason. The corporate boundaries of the city include a good deal of greenfield space. Development in the greenfield areas, rather than densification, is the principal cause of city growth, in Malaga and elsewhere.

Behind Malaga are the mountains that separate the coast from the inland valleys. The freeways winds for some miles up the mountains and descends much less to the valley floors above. Here, as throughout the Iberian peninsula, the mountains are reminiscent of the lower elevation coast ranges in California. But not too far away, one finds the real Sierra Nevada, not the California namesake. It is behind the old and culturally diverse city of Granada. But that is another tour.



Back to Malaga. The growth occurring in the Malaga area, especially along the coast in two directions, is proof of the desirability of the area. Malaga is a retirement haven that has the advantages of California mountains and their scenic interaction with the sea. It also has the architecture and life that can be found on the Florida coast. If the European Union ever opens its borders to Americans and Canadians like it has to its member states, you can bet that many would find their way here.





Heading North Toward the Pass



By Wendell Cox

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